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THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

WASHINGTON, D. C. 20505

National Intelligence Officers

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3 March 1982  
Copy 3

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence  
Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

FROM: National Intelligence Officer for Strategic Programs

SUBJECT: Reported Comments of Richard DeLauer on Soviet Space-Based Lasers

I concur with the attached SOVA briefing on the subject, although there have been some very recent revisions to the draft NIE 11-3/8-81 that are not reflected in the SOVA "comments." The relevant pages from the draft NIE are attached. As can be seen from the NIE text, we do not anticipate the "... deployment of (space-based) lasers as early as next year...." Soviet space-based laser activity during this decade probably will be limited to testing--possibly from a manned space station--of a prototype weapon for antisatellite use. Operational deployment of such a weapon will not likely occur before the 1990s. A prototype of such a weapon for ballistic missile defense probably could not be developed until well into the 1990s. We do not foresee space-based lasers "capable of effectively attacking ground, sea, and air targets" during the period of this Estimate.

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Attachment

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# Soviets Reported Ready to Orbit Laser Weapons

By George C. Wilson  
Washington Post Staff Writer

The Soviet military is well on its way to seizing the high ground of outer space, with the first big step the likely deployment of lasers there as early as next year, the Pentagon's research director said in secret papers inadvertently made public.

While the space-based lasers pose an early threat to American satellites used for spying, communicating, navigating and guiding missiles, Richard D. DeLauer painted an even grimmer picture for the 1990s.

"We expect a large, permanent, manned orbital space complex to be operational by about 1990... capable of effectively attacking... ground, sea and air targets from space," he told the House Armed Services Committee.

DeLauer's statement was supposed to have been kept secret, but Rep. Ken Kramer (R-Colo.) read it aloud last week during a public hearing, where it was tape-recorded by Walter Andrews of Army Times and published in that newspaper this week.

DeLauer's assessment represents a big advance over previous official assessments of Soviet preparations for space warfare and threatens to add a new dimension to the arms race between the superpowers.

Efforts to negotiate a way out of anti-satellite weapons have not been successful to date, although the United States and the Soviet Union agreed in 1967 "not to place in orbit around the earth, install on the moon or any other celestial body or otherwise station in outer space nuclear or any other weapons of mass destruction."

The U.S. military has become increasingly dependent on satellites whirling around the earth to determine what weapons the Soviets have produced, to provide warning of nuclear attack, to communicate from one part of the earth to another, to guide ships over the sea and missiles through the sky and to tell soldiers

exactly where they are on the ground at any given moment.

If DeLauer is correct, all those satellites may be threatened by powerful beams of light shot from laser guns riding around in space, where there is no atmosphere to bend and weaken the destructive rays. However, he could be giving too much credit to Soviet technology.

Former defense secretary Harold Brown credited the Soviets with weapons that might knock out low-flying spy satellites, but not the ones that hang over the earth at an altitude of 23,000 miles.

Defense Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger has earmarked \$218.3 million in the fiscal 1983 budget for space defense. He said, "We are assessing the technical feasibility of space-based laser weapons."

The Air Force is pursuing a number of weapons that could be shot into space to seek and destroy Soviet satellites. One idea is to rely on a collision, rather than explosives, to destroy the satellites, with iron shot and an umbrella of metal arms among the concepts.

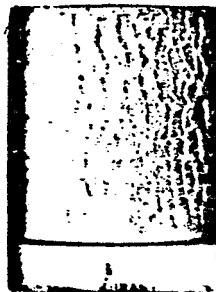
"If our understanding of Soviet space doctrine is correct," DeLauer said, "[it] will allow the Soviets to begin to place in orbit in the early 1990s systems capable of effectively attacking ground, sea and air targets from space." In other words, troops, ships and aircraft would be imperiled by Soviets looking down on them from their space ships, if DeLauer is correct.

The making public of DeLauer's estimates is almost certain to help build support for a bigger Pentagon space program, raising the question of whether the disclosure was purposeful. Reporter Andrews said last

night that DeLauer had tried to dissuade the Times from printing his statements, saying that "it would not be a good idea."

A source at the committee, where Kramer read DeLauer's comments at a public hearing last Thursday, said the quotations from Andrews' tape were accurate. A committee staffer stopped Kramer before he had read the entire DeLauer statement on the Soviet space program.

Air Force Gen. B. L. Davis, commander of the Strategic Air Command, had told the committee the day before in public session that, unless the United States prepares to operate in space, "The Soviets will eventually be able to deny us use of space as a support medium and use it as a high ground to launch attacks on U.S. targets. If they should achieve superiority in space, they could well attain a decisive war-winning edge."



See SPACE, A6, Col. 4